Civil society contribution to the 50ᵗʰ session of the UN Statistical Commission

Agenda item 3(q) on 'Drugs and drug use statistics'

February 2019

Background

In CND Resolution 60/1, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was officially invited to 'reflect on possibilities to strengthen and streamline its existing data-collection and analysis tools, including improving the quality and effectiveness of the annual report questionnaire, and to report to the Commission on possible ways to enhance these, for consideration by the Commission at its sixty-second session'.[1]

A year earlier, the drugs 'omnibus' resolution, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2016, also invited member states 'to consider the need to review the set of national drug policy metrics and tools for the collection and analysis of accurate, reliable, comprehensive and comparable data to measure the effectiveness of programmes to address all relevant aspects of the world drug problem, *including, as appropriate, as related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*' (emphasis added).[2]

On this basis, the UNODC initiated a review of its main data-collection tool on drugs – the Annual Reports Questionnaire (ARQ).[3] Such a review is urgently needed. First of all, the current ARQ does not cover many of the new issues and operational recommendations included in the 2016 UNGASS Outcome Document[4] – including, but not limited to, access to controlled medicines, proportionate sentencing, alternatives to prison or punishment, gender- and age-disaggregated data on access to health services and within the criminal justice system, and issues related to development.

Secondly, the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 requires that the ARQ be revised to ensure that tracking progress in drug control is in line with – and feeds into – the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) is mandated to report back to ECOSOC on its contribution to the achievement of the SDGs. Tracking progress towards drug control through the SDG lens is essential in this task. Tracking such progress is also critical to ensure more coherence within the UN system, in particular in making sure that drug policies contribute to, rather than undermine, the broader objectives of the United Nations.

Thirdly, a simplification and streamlining of drug-related indicators is urgently needed to increase the response rate to the ARQ, especially in Africa, Latin America and Asia.[5]

The UNODC kicked off the ARQ review process at an expert working group meeting on 29ᵗʰ to 31ˢᵗ January 2018, to discuss quality, gaps and challenges in data collection.[6] However, the meeting fell short of a meaningful reconsideration of the ARQ, and little discussion took place on how to incorporate UNGASS implementation and the achievement of the SDGs in a revised version of the ARQ. IDPC raised these and other concerns in a letter which was eventually shared by the UNODC to the participants of the meeting.[7]

Drug statistics in the UN Statistical Commission

Although most of the debates on drug-related data collection are taking place within UN drug control forums in Vienna, the consideration of statistics on drugs and drug use by the Statistical Commission is not new. Over the past ten years, the Commission discussed the issue at its 41st session (2010), 45th session (2014) and 48th session (2017).[8]

At the 48th session, the Statistical Commission was presented with the '*Report of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on an international road map to improve drug statistics*' (E/CN.3/2017/12).[9] The report notably concludes that 'Actions are needed across several fronts to consolidate existing systems to monitor the ever-changing patterns of consumption and production and to measure the effectiveness of programmes to address all relevant aspects of the world drug problem, including, as appropriate, *as related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*' (emphasis added).[10]

The Statistical Commission can play an important role in the ARQ review process, firstly on ensuring UN systemwide coherence on drug control by aligning drug statistics with the SDG targets and indicators, and secondly by helping to simplify and streamline the ARQ. IDPC therefore welcomes the inclusion, at the 50th session of the Commission, of an agenda item on 'drugs and drug use statistics',[11] and we wish to offer the following recommendations which we hope will be helpful for the discussions.

Recommendation 1: Proposing new drug-related indicators in line with the SDGs

Over the past ten years, the UN strategy on drugs – i.e. the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on 'international cooperation towards an integrated and balanced strategy to counter the world drug problem' – has aimed to eradicate illicit drug cultivation, trafficking and demand, as well as organised crime and money laundering.[12] A ten-year review of progress made towards these eradication goals has concluded that governments had failed to achieve any measurable reduction in any of these aspects, while punitive drug control strategies had led to serious harms on the health, human rights, security and development of affected communities.[13]

The international community is currently negotiating a new framework for the next decade in global drug control – which is planned to be adopted at a Ministerial Segment at the 62nd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on 14th and 15th March 2019.[14] The debates on the Ministerial Segment show a clear willingness, by a number of UN member states, to move away from the sole purpose of eradicating drugs, and consider instead directing efforts towards tackling health risks and harms, ensuring proportionate penalties and alternatives to incarceration, reducing violence and corruption, and addressing the many human rights abuses resulting from overly punitive drug control approaches.

Reconsidering the overall goals of global drug policy beyond the mere objective of achieving a drug-free society entails a rethink of the metrics and indicators used to evaluate progress. Furthermore, the adoption of the UNGASS Outcome Document and of the SDGs requires the UN and its member states to recalibrate their policies, including those relating to drug control, in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Statistical Commission has a wide array of experience in identifying measurable indicators, in particular on development – which has been a standing agenda item in the Commission for the past 20 years. Support from the Commission to adapt the many relevant SDG targets and indicators to drug policy would be invaluable in the ARQ review process, and we call on the Statistical Commission to provide recommendations to the UNODC and the CND in this regard. To help in this process, IDPC, alongside various civil society experts,[15] has identified a number of possible new drug indicators by adapting SDG targets and indicators, and linking them

to specific operational recommendations of the UNGASS Outcome Document (see Table 1).[16] We hope that these will be useful to the Statistical Commission as it considers agenda item 3(q).

Recommendation 2: Improving collaboration with other UN agencies to streamline data collection tools

In order to ensure coherence within the UN system, as well as to streamline drug-related data collection tools, it is critical that the UNODC and the CND work more closely with statistical experts from all relevant UN agencies, in particular the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Development Programme, UNICEF and UN Women, among others. We call on the Statistical Commission to promote this collaboration, and request that representatives of the Statistical Commission and other relevant UN agencies be invited to participate in the next expert working group meeting on the ARQ review, planned for 8th to 12th July 2019.

Table 1. Examples of possible drug policy indicators[17]

Original SDG target/indicator	Possible drug policy target/indicator & relevant paragraph in the UNGASS Outcome Document
Indicator 1.1.1: Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)	Proportion of people who use drugs below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural) (para 1.h)
Target 3.3: By 2030 end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases, and other communicable diseases	By 2030 end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis and combat hepatitis and other communicable diseases among people who inject drugs (para 1.o)
Indicator 3.3.1: Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations	Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected people who inject drugs, by sex, age (para 1.o)
	Number of people who inject drugs living with HIV under ART, by sex, age (para 1.o)
Indicator 3.3.2: Tuberculosis incidence per 1,000 population	Tuberculosis per 1,000 people who inject drugs, by sex, age (para 1.o)
	Proportion/Number of people who inject drugs infected by tuberculosis who have been treated and cured, by sex, age (para 1.o)
Indicator 3.3.4: Hepatitis B incidence per 100,000 population	Hepatitis B and C[685] incidence per 100,000 people who inject drugs, by sex, age (para 1.o)
	Number of people who inject drugs infected by hepatitis B and C under treatment, by sex, age (para 1.o)
Target 3.5: Strengthen prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol	Adoption of minimum quality standards for drug prevention and treatment, modelled on those developed by UNODC (para 1.h)
Indicator 3.5.1: Coverage of treatment interventions (pharmacological, psychosocial and rehabilitation and aftercare services) for substance use disorders	Coverage of treatment interventions (pharmacological, psychosocial and rehabilitation and aftercare services) for drug dependency both in the community and in prison, by sex, age (para 1.j, 4.m)
	Proportion/number of people dependent on drugs accessing voluntary and evidence-based drug dependence treatment, number of those having completed their treatment, and retention rate, by sex, age (para 1.j)

For more information

International Drug Policy Consortium (2018), *Taking stock: A decade of drug policy – A civil society shadow report*, http://fileserver.idpc.net/library/Shadow_Report_FINAL_ENGLISH.pdf

Social Science Research Council & International Peace Institute (2018), *Aligning agendas: Drugs, sustainable development and the drive for policy coherence*, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/1802_Aligning-Agendas.pdf

Endnotes

[1] https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_60/CNDres_2017/Resolution_60_1_60CND.pdf

[2] UN General Assembly (2016), *Resolution 71/211. International cooperation to address and counter the world drug problem*, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/860825

[3] https://www.unodc.org/arq/

[4] Available here: https://www.unodc.org/documents/postungass2016/outcome/V1603301-E.pdf

[5] See the 'Methodology Report' for: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018), *World Drug Report 2018*, https://www.unodc.org/wdr2018/prelaunch/WDR-2018-Methodology-web.pdf

[6] http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/statistics/expert-consultation-on-arq.html

[7] See IDPC's letter: http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Drugs/IDPC_letter_to_UNODC_on_ARQ_FINAL_002.pdf and accompanying annex: http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Drugs/IDPC_letter_to_UNODC_on_ARQ_ANNEX.PDF

[8] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/documents/Table-AgendaItems2010-2018.pdf

[9] http://webtv.un.org/search/5th-meeting-48th-session-of-the-un-statistical-commission-7-10-march-2017/5353919589001?term=UN%20Statistical%20Commission#full-text

[10] Available here: https://undocs.org/E/CN.3/2017/12

[11] See: agenda item 3(q) 'Drugs and drug use statistics', https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/

[12] See OP 36 of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action, available here: http://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_52/Political-Declaration2009_V0984963_E.pdf

[13] See: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018), *World Drug Report 2018*, https://www.unodc.org/wdr2018/; Commission on Narcotic Drugs (2017), *Action taken by Member States to implement the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem*, E/CN.7/2018/6, https://undocs.org/E/CN.7/2018/6; International Drug Policy Consortium (2018), *Taking stock: A decade of drug policy – A civil society shadow report*, http://fileserver.idpc.net/library/Shadow_Report_FINAL_ENGLISH.pdf

[14] For more information about the Ministerial Segment, see: http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/2019/2019-high-level-ministerial-segment.html

[15] See, for instance: Social Science Research Council & International Peace Institute (2018), *Aligning agendas: Drugs, sustainable development and the drive for policy coherence*, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/1802_Aligning-Agendas.pdf

[16] International Drug Policy Consortium (2018), *Taking stock: A decade of drug policy – A civil society shadow report*, http://fileserver.idpc.net/library/Shadow_Report_FINAL_ENGLISH.pdf

[17] For a full list, see pp. 98 to 107 of International Drug Policy Consortium (2018), *Taking stock: A decade of drug policy – A civil society shadow report*, http://fileserver.idpc.net/library/Shadow_Report_FINAL_ENGLISH.pdf